A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF HEREFORD,

ON

THURSDAY, the Third of AUGUST, 1797,

AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING

OF

THE SUBSCRIBERS

TO

THE GENERAL INFIRMARY,

IN THAT CITY.

BY

JOHN DUNCUMB, A. M.

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TO

THE GOVERNORS AND FRIENDS

OF THAT

EXCELLENT INSTITUTION,

THE

HEREFORD GENERAL INFIRMARY,

THIS SERMON

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT AND DEFERENCE,

BY

THEIR VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,

J. DUNCUMB.

A

SERMON.

LUKE X. 37.

—GO, AND DO THOU LIKEWISE.

THE univerſal benevolence which characterizes the Chriſtian religion, is beautifully pourtrayed and illuſtrated in the circumſtances which gave riſe to this precept of our Saviour. It appears, that whilſt this great teacher was explaining to the people of Decapolis, the nature of their obligations to God and to their neighbour, that one of his hearers aſked him, "And who is my neighbour?"---The inſtruction contained in our Saviour's reply, will loſe none of its value from any ſuſpicion of the motives which might lead to the enquiry; nor does the paſſage ſtand in need of any expoſition to render it clear and perſpicuous to the moſt common underſtanding: "A certain man went down from Jeruſalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who ſtripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain prieſt that way; and when he ſaw him, he paſſed by on the other ſide. And likewiſe a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and paſſed by on the other ſide. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where

where he was; and when he ſaw him, he had compaſſion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and ſet him on his own beaſt, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two-pence, and gave them to the hoſt, and ſaid unto him, Take care of him: and whatſoever thou ſpendeſt more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of theſe three, thinkeſt thou, was *neighbour* unto him that fell among the thieves? And the lawyer ſaid, He that ſhewed mercy on him. Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, Go, and do thou likewiſe."

In this inſtance, although the religion of the one was moſt eſſentially different from that of the other; and although the malevolence of the Jews was carried to ſo abſurd an extent towards the Samaritans, that even acts of common intercourſe were prohibited, and the woman at Jacob's well had expreſſed her ſurprize that our Saviour, "as a Jew, ſhould aſk water of her who was a woman of Samaria;"*---yet here natural humanity triumphed over every prejudice, and induced the Samaritan to relieve the wounded traveller. The comment of our Saviour on this conduct moſt pointedly inſtructed his followers, that the charity and benevolence of a Chriſtian, are to be confined to neither ſect nor ſituation, neither language nor country, but are to embrace within their limits all mankind.

* 1 John iv. 9.

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The juſtice and value of many of the heathen maxims of morality are indiſputable; and the ſentiment of a Latin poet, "that as a man himſelf he felt a common intereſt in every thing which related to man,"* does honour to human nature. But the writings of their philoſophers were not of ſufficient authority to give effect to the morals they taught, nor to introduce into practice, the rules they recommended. Human means alone, were, perhaps, inadequate to ſo great an end: but how admirably was it afterwards effected, by the example and the doctrine of the author of Chriſtianity. That amiable ſyſtem applied as well to the reformation of manners, as to the improvement of morals: it was equally favourable to civil as to religious liberty; and it diſſeminated no principles, but ſuch as were calculated to improve, adorn, and dignify our nature.

Attempts to depreciate this ſyſtem, to undermine its authority, and to induce us to reject every thing in it which we have hitherto venerated, have, perhaps, been more open and frequent in this than in other periods; and if thoſe only were affected, who are competent to decide on the ſubject, the cauſe of truth, in this as in every other caſe, muſt eventually have profited by the diſcuſſion it has introduced. The opinion of a diſtinguiſhed character (now no more) in favour of the value, the im-

* Homo ſum: humani nihil a me alienum puto.
Ter. Heaut. Act. 1 S. 1.

portance

portance and the authenticity of the Chriſtian Scriptures, cannot fail to poſſeſs great weight in every impartial mind. His general knowledge and his accuracy of reſearch, muſt have peculiarly qualified him for ſuch an inveſtigation: the ſtrength and ſoundneſs of his judgement entitled his concluſions to credit; and his great proficiency in the original language in which they were compoſed, muſt have enabled him to have diſtinguiſhed the truth, from the luxuriance of fancy, or the allegory of expreſſion. The teſtimony alluded to, bears every external mark of ſincere and genuine piety: "I have regularly and attentively peruſed the Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion, that independently of their divine origin, that volume contains more ſublimity and beauty, more pure morality, more important hiſtory, and finer ſtrains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been compoſed."* To this may be added, the prophetic declaration of a diſtinguiſhed Prelate, whoſe extenſive erudition and ---above all---whoſe liberality of ſentiment, do honour to his rank and ſituation. Replying to the arguments of a modern deiſt, whoſe writings have attracted conſiderable notice, he thus addreſſes him: " The Bible, Sir, has withſtood the learning of Porphyry, and the power of Julian, to ſay nothing of the manichean Fauſtus; it has reſiſted the genius of Bolingbroke, and the wit of Voltaire; to ſay no-

* Sir William Jones.

thing

thing of a numerous herd of inferior aſſailants---and it will not fall by your force."*

Amongſt other happy improvements, the firſt public inſtitutions for the relief of the poor in caſes of illneſs or accident, date their origin from the introduction of Chriſtianity: nor is it unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, that our Saviour's narrative of the compaſſionate Samaritan might have contributed to ſuggeſt and promote theſe truly charitable eſtabliſhments. The Temple of Theſeus, at Athens, in affording a ſanctuary for diſtreſs of a different nature, perhaps approached the neareſt to foundations of this kind before the Chriſtian æra. But if Greece and Rome excelled in the ſplendor of their public edifices, later ages have the ſatisfaction of exceeding them, in the purpoſes to which they are applied; and as long as the preſervation of mankind is deemed ſuperior to their deſtruction, the Temple of Mars muſt not be compared with the Aſylum for ſuffering humanity. Wherever the Chriſtian doctrines have been taught and received, theſe inſtitutions have been eſtabliſhed with ſucceſs. "Benevolence has ever been the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of Chriſtianity, as oppoſed to every other denomination of men---Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans: In the times of the Apoſtles, and in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, it ſhewed itſelf in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and perſecuted,

* Biſhop Watſon's Reply to Paine's Age of Reaſon, p. 335.

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the infirm and unfortunate: as ſoon as the church was permitted to have permanent poſſeſſions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itſelf in the erection of hoſpitals of every kind; inſtitutions theſe, of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus, and for even one example of which, the boaſted annals of Pagan Rome will be explored in vain."*

In ſome countries, a particular order of Laymen and Eccl ſiaſtics exiſt, whoſe province it is to attend the ſick and the poor, for the purpoſe of adminiſtering ſpiritual and temporal relief†: In this nation, we hope Chriſtianity prevails in its pureſt form: here then, all its effects ſhould appear in the moſt conſpicuous light; and here we find, that in addition to the "legal proviſion for the poor, which was unknown and unthought of by the moſt poliſhed nations of antiquity,"‡ the metropolis alone contains receptacles for almoſt every ſpecies of misfortune or diſtreſs, to which humanity is liable§. The fabrics which public virtue has thus reared in alleviation of private miſery, not only proclaim the

* Biſhop Watſon's Apology for Chriſtianity, p. 126.

† They are called "Brothers of Charity," and prevail in ſome of the countries ſubject to the ſee of Rome.

‡ Paley's Philoſophy.

§ Mr. Colquhoun, in his excellent Treatiſe on the Police of the Metropolis, recommends the inſtitution of a public charity to afford employment to thoſe perſons who have been brought to public trial and acquitted.

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benevolence, but conſtitute the ornaments of the country; and the reſidence of the Chief Magiſtrate of the realm is eclipſed in magnificence, by the manſions appropriated to the relief of diſeaſe and affliction. The ſame ſpirit of Chriſtian philanthropy has pervaded the whole kingdom, and few provinces remain without their peculiar Infirmary or Hoſpital.

On brotherly kindneſs and charity in general, the Scriptures are perhaps more copious and explicit than on any other duty. Our Saviour called it "a new commandment," when he urged his followers "to love one another." St. Paul alſo deſcribed it with unuſual minuteneſs; "Charity ſuffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itſelf; is not puffed up; doth not behave itſelf unſeemly; ſeeketh not her own; is not eaſily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." He even appears to prefer it to every virtue: "though I ſpeak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not Charity, I am become as ſounding braſs or a tinkling cymbal: although I have the gift of prophecy, and underſtand all myſteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith ſo that I could remove mountains, and have not Charity, I am nothing." To this it may be oppoſed, that the charity here alluded to, means

rather

rather a general ſpirit of love, extending both to God and our fellow-creatures, than to that particular branch which conſiſts in relieving others; but St. James has written, "if a brother or ſiſter be naked and deſtitute of daily food, and one of you ſay unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithſtanding ye give them not thoſe things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?"* And this particular ſtreſs appears to be laid, becauſe the benevolence recommended is not only that temper and diſpoſition of mind, which is the higheſt improvement of our rational nature, but alſo becauſe it is that temper and diſpoſition which inclining us to do good and to take pleaſure in doing it, conſtitutes the happineſs of intellectual creatures. "The effect which theſe and ſimilar precepts of Chriſtianity, produced on ſome of its firſt converts, was ſuch as might be expected from a divine religion coming with full force and miraculous evidence on the conſciences of mankind. It overwhelmed all worldly conſiderations in the thoughts of a more important exiſtence,"† and "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one ſoul; neither ſaid any of them, that ought of the things which he poſſeſſed was his own, but they had all things common."‡

* James ii. 15 and 16. † Paley's Philoſophy.
‡ Acts iv. 32.

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In the elegant moral ſyſtem of an Author* of the preſent day, it is concluded that " the final cauſe for which compaſſion was appointed, is to afford to the miſerable a remedy for thoſe inequalities and diſtreſſes which God foreſaw that many muſt be expoſed to, under every general rule for the diſtribution of property." And however ſeverely this inequality may ſeem to preſs on a large portion of mankind, yet as creatures animated by his breath, and unable to reſiſt his will; as men endowed with all the valuable faculties of the mind, and as Chriſtians, diſtinguiſhed by the moſt eminent marks of God's favour and mercy, our dependence---our reaſon---and our gratitude ſhould teach us to reſpect what Providence has ordained. As Engliſhmen, we ſhould more particularly acquieſce in this gradation; not only from the circumſtance that the higher ranks amongſt us, form a branch of our conſtitution in its pureſt theory; but alſo from the recollection, that their exertions, in various and critical periods of our hiſtory, have ſecured ſome of the moſt valuable privileges we enjoy; and that, amongſt the deſcendants of our ancient Nobility, are ſtill found thoſe, who add luſtre to their birth, by acting as the champions of our liberties and the aſſertors of our rights. But the farther this diſpenſation is examined, the greater occaſion ſhall we have to praiſe and to reſpect it. By theſe

* Paley.

diſtinctions,

diſtinctions, are formed and promoted, in a high degree, the intercourſe of ſociety, the comforts of life, and the ſecurity of every thing we poſſeſs. The effects of the Agrarian Law of Rome were not ſuch as to induce its adoption by other nations, whether recurring to firſt principles, or trying the moſt ſpeculative forms of government. Under ſuch a ſyſtem, carried to its full extent, each individual might in a greater or leſs degree have confined his fears and his wiſhes to himſelf; each might have lived in indifference or enmity with all around him; the lower offices of life, which are equally neceſſary as thoſe attached to exalted ſituations, might have been deſpiſed and neglected: the Arts and Sciences, from the want of a free intercourſe and exchange of ideas, might have made no progreſs; Civilization, from the ſame cauſe, would have been materially impeded; and ſuperior ſagacity would generally have extended its influence no farther than the narrow limits of its poſſeſſor's mind. But in our preſent ſituation, connected by our mutual wants, and neceſſitated to adopt an active intercourſe, genius and ability may be exerted with the fulleſt effect, and benevolence may range in the wideſt ſphere. With all the comforts of private friendſhip, how ſatisfactory is the recollection, that by mutual acts of kindneſs we promote a general welfare, by forming and cementing a general ſociety; and that the intereſts of men are ſo interwoven, that public

happineſs

happineſs can alone be compoſed of individual proſperity. Under this wiſe arrangement, the Chriſtian doctrines have promoted and encouraged a ſpirit of private liberality, which has done peculiar honour to our own age and country; and the names of HOWARD and HANWAY cannot fail to be venerated, as long as philanthropy and virtue are thought worthy of eſteem: men, whoſe lives and property were ſincerely devoted to the relief of their fellow-creatures; whoſe cares extended to the loweſt and moſt miſerable claſſes of ſociety; and whoſe reſearches penetrated the moſt ſequeſtered, remote, or even loathſome ſituations. To a ſimilar ſpirit, and to principles congenial with theſe, is to be aſcribed the eſtabliſhment of that benevolent inſtitution, in the ſupport of which we are now aſſembled. Amongſt the Founders and Benefactors of this Charity, are enrolled names which we are accuſtomed to eſteem and revere. "The important advantages of it are ſatisfactorily proved by the experience of twenty-one years, and the relief adminiſtered within that period to many thouſands of ſick poor;"* and amidſt the various recommendations to this mode of diſpenſing Charity, none are more obvious and forcible than the certainty that "a contribution goes farther towards attaining the

* Report and Reſolutions of the Governors, the 15th of June, 1797.

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end for which it is given, than it can do by any private or ſeparate beneficence."*

To ſubſtitute hope for deſpair, to alleviate the poignancy of unexpected diſtreſs---to ſoothe affliction ---and to adminiſter comfort on the bed of deſpondency and ſickneſs---are actions which every generous mind muſt feel a pleaſure in performing: It is yours to diſtribute theſe bleſſings around you, and yours to enjoy the ſatisfactory reſult. Expoſed as we all are, not only to natural infirmities, but to various and ſudden calamities, which no human foreſight can diſtinguiſh, nor human care prevent; how anxious ſhould we be, to lighten the miſery of thoſe, who although differing from us in the means of comfort and relief, are ſtill fellow-creatures with ourſelves, formed of the ſame materials, poſſeſſed of the ſame feelings, and endowed with every property common to our nature. But, unfortunately, general arguments will not alone apply to the immediate ſubject of our conſideration: "in the common courſe of nature, the Charity has been deprived of many of its beſt Benefactors; the general preſſure of the times," unparalleled in the hiſtory of this nation, "has alſo very conſiderably tended to the reduction of its income,"† and "we are informed, that without ſpecial and extraordinary aid, an inſtitution of the moſt approved and extenſive utility will be neceſſitated to

* Paley.

† Governors' Addreſs, &c.

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abridge, if not wholly to diſcontinue its valuable aſſiſtance to that wretched claſs, who ſuffer the complicated evils of poverty and diſeaſe."*

Thus are the objects of this Charity reduced to the ſituation of the unfortunate traveller deſcribed by our Saviour: ſhall we then imitate the unfeeling Prieſt, and refuſe our aſſiſtance? Shall we, like the Levite, tamely look on, or paſs by on the other ſide? Shall the apathy of the Stoic ſuperſede the benevolence of the Chriſtian? Shall cold indifference deſtroy that fabric which was reared by Senſibility, and dedicated to Virtue?

When cares aſſail us, when diſorder enfeebles, when age enervates, then, when reflection will intrude, what can afford us more effectual comfort, than the conſciouſneſs of having adminiſtered it to others? Extend our views, and every argument is at once before us, which can animate our hopes, or alarm our apprehenſions, in the moſt awful moment which ever can occur: when "the King ſhall ſay unto them on his right hand, come, ye bleſſed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world; for I was an hungred and ye gave me meat, I was thirſty and ye gave me drink, I was a ſtranger and ye took me in, naked and ye cloathed me: I was ſick and ye viſited me: I was in priſon and ye came unto me. Then ſhall the righteous anſwer him ſaying, Lord, when

* Governors' Addreſs, &c.

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ſaw we thee an hungred and fed thee, or thirſty and gave thee drink? when ſaw we thee a ſtranger and took thee in, or naked and cloathed thee? or when ſaw we thee ſick or in priſon and came unto thee? And the King ſhall anſwer and ſay unto them, verily I ſay unto you, inaſmuch as ye have done it to one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

* Matthew xxv. 34.

END.